

Governors Island, Fort Columbus (Fort Jay)
Building #214
Governors Island
New York Harbor
New York City
New York County
New York

HABS No. NY-5715-1D

HABS
NY,
31-GOV,
1D-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOVERNORS ISLAND, FORT COLUMBUS (FORT JAY)
BUILDING 214

HABS NO. NY-5715-1D

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For background information, see documentation HABS No. NY-4-6 on Fort Columbus (Fort Jay)

Location: Fort Jay, north side of quadrangle, Governors Island, New York Harbor, New York, New York.

Present Owner: United States Coast Guard

Present Occupants: 214A Commander and Mrs. F. Scaraglino
214B Commander and Mrs. C. D. Nelson
214C Vacant
214D Commander and Mrs. P. Regan

Significance: Since its construction in the 1830s the building has served an essential function. It is one of a set of four nearly identical buildings within Fort Jay that have been in continuous use as quarters for troops and officers garrisoned on the Island. Despite alterations over nearly a century and a half, this two-story brick building with monumental two-story portico essentially retains its original architectural character.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Work on new barracks buildings to replace old ones within the fort was begun at least by 1834. The Engineering Department reported in that year that the masonry of the buildings on the south, west and north sides of the parade was nearly complete and the roofs ready to receive their covering. Work had also begun on the east barracks (American State Papers, vol. 5, p. 386). Work obviously proceeded slowly as an inspection report from September 1836 noted that the quarters were not yet ready for occupancy (Sheras to Cross, September 24, 1836). Two months later the Engineering Department reported the following: "The necessary plastering and painting will be finished this month, as well as the iron work and roofing of the barracks, at which time it is also expected the carpentry will be completed" (Ibid, vol. 6, p. 847). Triangular buildings were placed at the corners of each of the four barracks by 1839 and used at that time as privies and offices.
2. Architect: The building was probably designed by either the Engineering or Quartermaster Department on the Island.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The United States Army was the original owner. Ownership was transferred to the United States Coast Guard in 1966.

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4. Builder: Construction work was probably done by the Army under the direction of Captain J. L. Smith of the Engineering Department who was supervising construction work on the Island at the time the building was erected.
5. Original plans and construction: Plate 1, an 1839 elevation and floor plan of the barracks buildings and officers' quarters within Fort Columbus, is the earliest drawing discovered. The drawing is in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives, Record Group 77, Fortifications File, Drawer 37, Sheet 23. The drawing also illustrates the small triangular buildings placed at each end of the larger buildings at some time during the 1830s.
6. Alterations and additions: Soon after construction, the plan of the barracks buildings was found to be unsatisfactory. A Board of Officers appointed to examine the conditions of the barracks and quarters on the Island reported in 1839 that the buildings did "not seem to be well adapted to the purposes for which they were designed." According to the Board, the rooms were too small and poorly ventilated, and inappropriately placed windows subjected the men to sudden changes of weather. Space allotted for colonnades on the front of the buildings could have been more wisely used to enlarge the rooms. The Board also felt that expanding the parade ground by placing the buildings next to the terreplein wall was unwise, since it allowed no space for exits at the rear of the buildings. Actually, removal of the barracks from their earlier position had not added sufficiently to the open space within the fort, and its use as a parade ground remained limited. To alleviate some of these problems, plans for making the interiors more functional were proposed by Colonel James Bankhead in 1844 (Plate 2). Iron balconies accessible by exterior stairs were to be placed on the second story of all four buildings, and windows at the ends and center were to be converted to doors opening onto the balconies. Interior stairways could then be removed and the rooms enlarged in the enlisted barracks.

The proposed changes were apparently not made in the mid-1840s since another set of alterations to the buildings was proposed in 1855. Plate 3 illustrating proposed changes in the floor plan and exterior stairways which differed little from the earlier proposals was submitted to the Chief of Engineers. The drawing does illustrate a further alteration not recommended in the earlier plans. The flat roof was to become a hipped roof. The suggestion to raise the roof had been made at least five years earlier since the interiors had been repeatedly damaged by leaks (Whiting to Jesup, January 28, 1850). The alterations were presumably made at the time although this could not be

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documented. The changes were obviously made by 1863 when an inspection report noted that each of the three enlisted barracks had a balcony.

Excerpts from a detailed report made by the Surgeon General's Office in 1868 further document that the building had been altered.

Corridors extend the whole length of these buildings on the face looking to the parade; on all the buildings to either side of the sallyports a piazza is built the width of the corridors and on three of the buildings a piazza extends the whole part of the upper story but only half the width of the corridor. This piazza is supported by iron rafters extending from the building to the pillars of the corridor, a stairway leads from each end of the upper piazza to the lower one....In the mens quarters there are no halls - all stairways being built out doors....

The small triangular structure at the east end was incorporated into the larger building and a second story added about 1898. (Cartographic and Architectural Branch, National Archives, Fort Jay, Governors Island, New York, Drawer 37).

In 1920-21, the building was converted to officers' housing (HABS, 1934, p. 4). The floor plan was probably changed at the time of the conversion. The 1934 HABS drawings illustrate a plan for Building #202 having two quarters on each floor. (See sheets 2-4 included in copies of drawing included with photographs following Fort Jay data.) The plan for the converted quarters in Building #214 was probably similar.

At some point, the terreplein was cut away from behind the parapet so that it sloped down to the basement floor level allowing windows to be cut through the old retaining wall. By 1934, this wall formed the rear wall of the basement (HABS, 1934, p. 6). This may have been done during the 1920-21 conversion to make quarters in the basement more livable.

In 1936-38 the interior was altered once again. The plan was changed to four two-story units above basement maid and utility rooms. The plan changes necessitated alterations to the building's fenestration pattern as well. Architectural drawings documenting these alterations are on file in the Coast Guard Facilities Engineering Division Governors Island. (Copies are contained in the photographs following the Bibliography, HABS No. NY-5715-1D-7 through NY-5715-1D-9.) Double brick garages were built in the bastions at the same time.

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- B. Historical Context: Buildings to garrison the troops on Governors Island were an important element of the Fort Columbus complex from the beginning. The fort, initially constructed in the 1790s, contained three such buildings. The three survived the demolition of Fort Jay in 1805 and were joined shortly by two additional buildings. These are shown on Plates 4 and 5 a cross-section of the Island drawn in 1813. By 1827, the barracks buildings within the fort were in a bad state of decay with leaking roofs and deteriorated woodwork, masonry and plaster (Stanton to Jesup, March 18, 1827). Five years later, the Chief of Engineers reported that the entire removal of floors, ceilings and roofs was necessary and that the building shells were not worth saving. He recommended that the barracks be removed to a situation within the fort that would enlarge the parade ground (American State Papers, vol. 5, p. 42). Construction of new barracks within the fort began at least by 1834 and was completed several years later.

Once constructed, Building #214 was occupied by enlisted troops. The building appears to have remained as enlisted barracks into the 20th century. A report from 1875 noted that 16 to 18 single bunks were in each of the large rooms within the building (Circular No. 8, Surgeon General's Office, 1875). In that year, Companies A and C and the music boys of Company B occupied the three barracks buildings, but the report did not specify which company was quartered in Building #214.

The building was converted to officers' quarters in 1920-21 (HABS, 1934, p. 4). In March of 1934, it was occupied by four officers and their families (Ibid). In the same year, plans were made to remodel the interiors of all four buildings giving them a completely new floor plan. Work began on Building #202 in 1934 and was completed on the other three between 1936 and 1938 as part of the extensive work done on the Island by the Works Progress Administration. Building #214 remains as officers' quarters housing four families.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The building is one of four nearly identical Greek Revival styled structures originally used as quarters for troops and officers housed on the Island. The four buildings form a unified group with impressive porticoes featuring two-story masonry columns along the facades facing onto the quadrangle. Although altered several times by the incorporation of the small triangular building on the east side and by changes in the roof line, the building essentially

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retains its architectural character on the exterior. The interior however has been entirely altered from the original and exhibits details typical of the 1930s period.

2. Condition of fabric: The building is well maintained and is in good condition throughout.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is rectangular with an acute angle on the northeast corner made by the incorporation of a small triangular structure into the larger one. It is 12 bays wide on the south or front side and measures 182' 4" x 22' 1". The building is two stories above a raised basement. The basement is above grade on the north and west sides.
2. Foundations: The foundation is stone approximately 1' 9" thick on the south, east and west sides and 3' 1" on the north side.
3. Walls: Basement walls are random red sandstone and granite ashlar on the south, west and east sides. The basement wall of the north or back side is parged and extends approximately 1' 9" beyond the wall above. The fabric underneath is probably stone with a brick facing. First and second story walls are red brick laid in Flemish bond with queen closers at the corners. Areas on the east end of the north and south walls and also on the east wall are laid in 4-1, 5-1 and 6-1 common bond indicating newer brick work resulting from incorporation of the small triangular structure. The walls show evidence of sandblasting.
4. Structural system: Exterior walls are masonry load bearing 1' 4" thick on the first floor and 1' on the second. On the interior, partition walls are 4" to 6" between units and 4" elsewhere. Floor joists are 3" x 12", 16" on center.
5. Porches, balconies: The major feature of the south portico is the 12 fluted masonry Doric columns set on coursed granite and red sandstone ashlar bases. The columns rise two stories to support a wooden entablature and hipped roof. The wrought iron balustrade is made of a narrow rail with diagonal and vertical balusters. Plates bearing military emblems are placed at the points where the vertical members cross. The porch deck is tongue and groove planks painted grey. Steps leading to the porch in the second, fourth, eighth and tenth bays have stone treads and brick risers. Under the porch, the interstices between the piers are red brick laid in a basketwork pattern. A

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second story balcony with an identical balustrade supported by metal brackets attached to the wall and columns extends the full length of the facade. The floor of the balcony is tongue and groove planks.

Two wrought iron balconies supported by iron posts are at the first floor level on the north side. These are above the areaway between the north wall of the building and the retaining wall of the terreplein. The wrought iron balustrades have thin square balusters.

6. Chimneys: Four interior brick chimneys are set to the north of the ridge.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: On the south side, doors are located in the second, fourth, eighth and twelfth bays in the first and second stories. Doors are wooden paneled and have three light transoms. Each unit has a single wood and glass door on the first floor of the north side. A large semielliptical postern in the sixth bay extends north-south through the building and is terminated by the entrance to the arsenal in the north ravelin.
 - b. Windows: Windows are typically six-over-six-light double hung sash with brick jack arches and stone or precast stone lug sills.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The hipped roofs of both the building and the porch are covered with asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The boxed eaves which appear to be wooden, contain the gutters and partially obscure a corbelled brick cornice.

B. Description of Interior:

The building is divided into four quarters each two stories above the basement. Since floor plans and interior finishes are similar, only one unit, Quarters #214B, was examined.

1. Floor plan:
 - a. Basement: The basement is entered from the first floor by a straight run stairway facing east along the south wall.

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A narrow stair hall runs east-west along the south wall. To the north of the hall, are a laundry room on the east, a maid's room with a bathroom and a storage room.

- b. First floor: On the first floor, the entrance opens onto a small space. To the right is the living room with a fireplace on the west wall and the stairs on the south wall. The kitchen which has a large walk-in pantry is north of the dining room.
 - c. Second floor: The second floor has three bedrooms along the north wall. There is a bathroom to the south of the westernmost bedroom. Each bedroom opens off the stair hall which runs east-west and is parallel to the stairs on the south wall. A second bathroom terminates the hall on the east.
2. Stairways: A straight-run stairway along the south wall leads to the second floor. The turned newel post, rail, square balusters, plain stinger, treads and risers are wood which has been painted. On the second floor a balustrade with paired turned newels encloses the stairwell along the north side.
- Below this stairway on the first floor is a second straight-run stairway leading to the basement. The stairs are separated from the main entry on the first floor by a door. The newel post is square as is the single baluster to the east of the wall along the north side of the stairs. All structural members of the stairway are wood which has been painted. Non-skid rubber matting covers the treads.
3. Flooring: Floors on the first and second floors are varnished wood boards about $2\frac{1}{4}$ " wide. The kitchen floor is linoleum. Bathroom floors are hexagonal tile. Basement floors are concrete and wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings are plaster. Living and dining room ceilings are coved with pronounced, carved plaster molding on the ceiling. Bathroom walls have a ceramic tile wainscoting.
5. Openings:
- a. Doorways and doors: Doors are typically wood, parallel with beaded wooden surrounds.
 - b. Windows: Windows are typically recessed with deep wooden sills and beaded wooden surrounds.

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6. Decorative features and trim: The only fireplace in 214B is on the west wall of the living room. Painted fluted pilasters flank the opening and support the wooden mantel. The facing brick has been painted white, and the hearth is red quarry tile.
7. Hardware: Door hardware is typically plain brass plates and knobs. Doors to the exterior have more elaborate Art Deco brass plates and knobs. A maid's button of mother of pearl set in a brass plate is in the second story stair hall.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning: Heating is by steam with radiators in each room. These are typically placed in recesses below the windows and are generally obscured by metal covers. Cooling is achieved by window air conditioners.

D. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation: The building faces south onto the quadrangle within the fort. This area, which is divided into four sections by paved roadways, is planted with grass and trees and contains playground equipment and a picnic table. Across the quadrangle and to the east and west are three similar structures. On the rear or north side is an areaway surrounded by a chain link fence and the north ravelin enclosed by a chain link fence. The flag pole is within the fenced area. Directly behind the building's sallyport is a coursed red sandstone ashlar facade with arched entrance leading to an underground arsenal. Four large metal ventilators and a small brick structure high to the north of the buildings are the only other portions of the arsenal which are above grade. Also at the rear of the building is a circular concrete foundation marking the location of a water tank that has been demolished. To the west is a small, triangular, stone and brick, one-story above basement structure (Building #213) connected to the larger building on the south by a red sandstone wall. Stone driveways to the east and west lead to brick double garages.
2. Outbuildings: To the west of the building, is a small triangular, one-story, flat-roofed structure (Building #213) measuring 23' x 19'. The basement walls are random red sandstone and granite ashlar on the west and east sides. The basement wall on the north side has been parged. Entrance to the first floor is through a metal door on the north and to the basement by a wooden-paneled flush door on the east. Windows are four-over-four-light double hung sash with stone lug sills

and brick jack arches on the north and on the first story of the east side. Window openings on the basement have been covered with plywood panels. The smaller structure, which is currently used as a storehouse is connected to the larger building on the south by a coursed red sandstone ashlar wall with rectangular opening. The wall is continuous with the basement wall of Building #213.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

The following drawings are located in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives in Record Group 77, Maps and Plans of the Office of the Chief of Engineers.

Plan of Fort Columbus, Governor's Island, New York, Divided Into Two Sections. The First Showing the Original Work. The Second Exhibiting the Repairs and Alterations Proposed to be Adopted in Completing the Authorized Repairs. Major R. E. DeRussey. October 17, 1832. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 8.

Sheet No. 9, Details of Barracks, Fort Columbus, Governors Island. Capt. J. G. Barnard. December 1839. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 23. Illustrates the facades and floor plans of the recently constructed buildings.

Proposed Alteration in Soldiers Quarters in Fort Columbus, 1855. Fortification File, Fort Columbus Drawer 37, sheet 39. Alterations were probably completed shortly after the plans were submitted.

Officers Quarters in Fort Columbus with Proposed Alterations, 1855. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 40. Alterations were probably completed shortly after the plans were submitted.

Proposed Alterations to the Barracks and Officers' Quarters within Fort Columbus, 1844. Filed with Colonel James Bankhead to Brigadier General R. Jones, November 5, 1844. Box 98, Colonel James Bankhead, Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1915, Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives. The proposed alterations were not done at the time.

Drawings dated 1936-1937, which document the changes made to the building by the WPA include floor plans, porch details, stair details, doors and mantels, are on file at the U.S. Coast Guard, Support Center, New York, Facilities Engineering Office on Governors Island.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

The following sources are located in Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1915, Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Major Henry Stanton to Brigadier General Thomas Jesup, March 18, 1827. Box 346, Governors Island. Describes condition of original barracks buildings within the fort.

Proceedings of a Board of Officers convened on the first day of April Eighteen hundred and thirty-nine. Box 191, Fort Columbus. Notes that the barracks buildings within the fort had recently been completed and discusses what the Board considered to be the poor design of the buildings.

Colonel James Bankhead to Brigadier General R. Jones, November 5, 1844. Box 98, Colonel James Bankhead. Discusses problems with the plans and proposes alterations to make the buildings more functional. A drawing showing the proposed changes is filed with the letter.

Inspection report made on Public Buildings, Officers and Troop Quarters at Fort Columbus New York Harbor on the 31st day of October 1863 by 1st Lieut. James L. Casey, 5th Infantry, Acting Assistant Quartermaster U.S. Army. Box 191, Fort Columbus. Lists number of rooms per floor in the buildings.

Colonel H. Whiting to General Thomas Jesup, January 28, 1850. Box 346, Governors Island. Discusses problems resulting from the nearly flat roof and recommends raising the pitch of the roof.

2. Secondary and published sources:

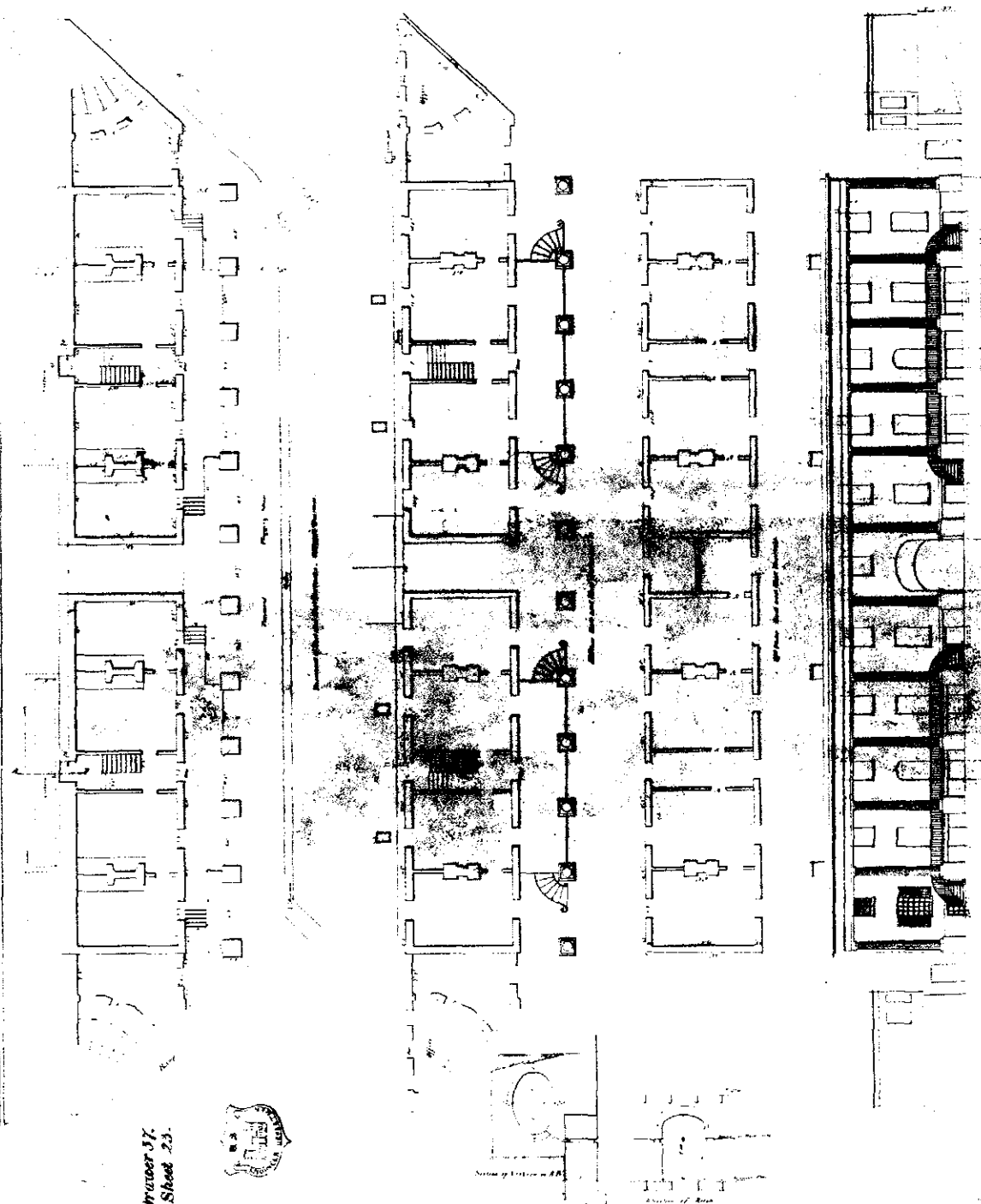
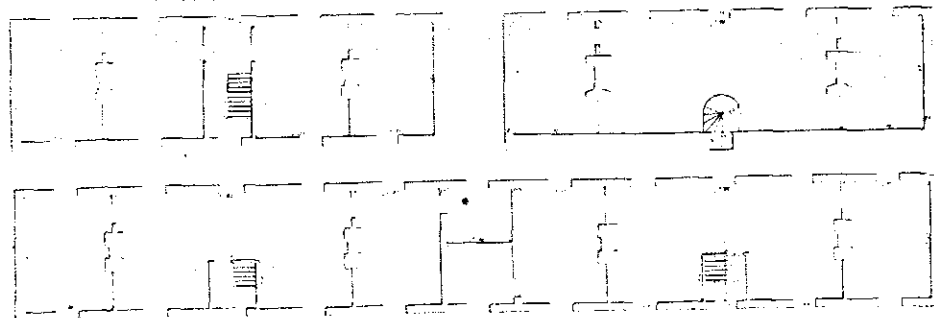
U.S. Surgeon General's Office. Governor's Island, Record of Medical History of the Post. Washington, D.C.: Medical Department, U.S. Army, May 14, 1868. Gives detailed description of the building and its use in 1868.

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U.S. Surgeon General's Office. Circular No. 4, A Report on Barracks and Hospitals with Descriptions of Military Posts. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1870.
Description of the building's interior, exterior and use.

. A Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army, with Descriptions of Military Posts. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875.

American State Papers: Documents Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States. Class V, Military Affairs. vol. 5. Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1860. Briefly describes the progress of construction during the 1830s.



Drawer 37,
Sheet 23.



Plate 1

Photocopy of Drawing of Barracks, Fort Jay, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 37, sheet 23
Details for Officer's and Soldier's Quarters
Drawn by Captain J.G. Barnard, December 1839

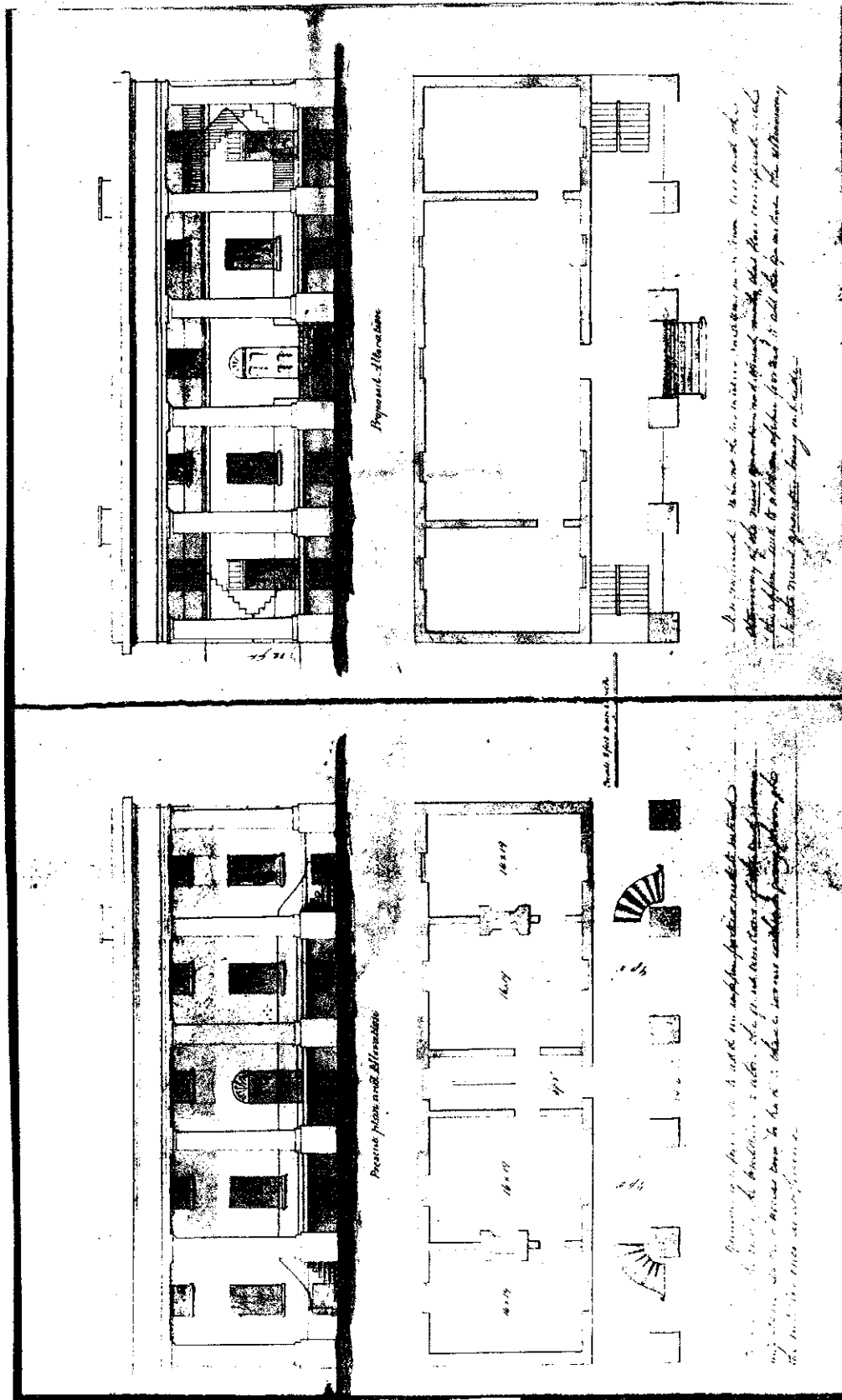
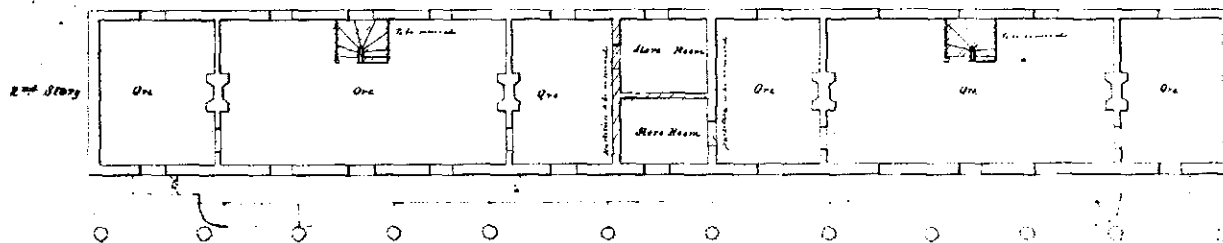
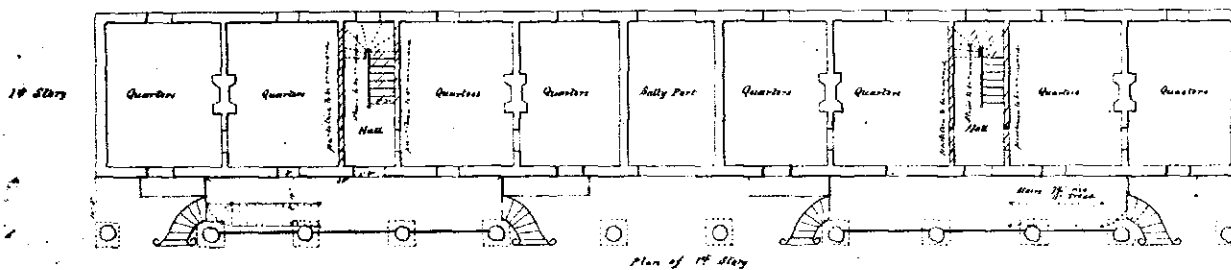
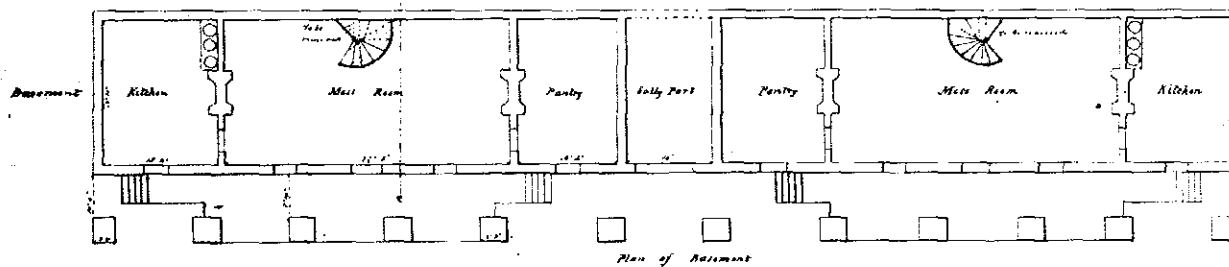
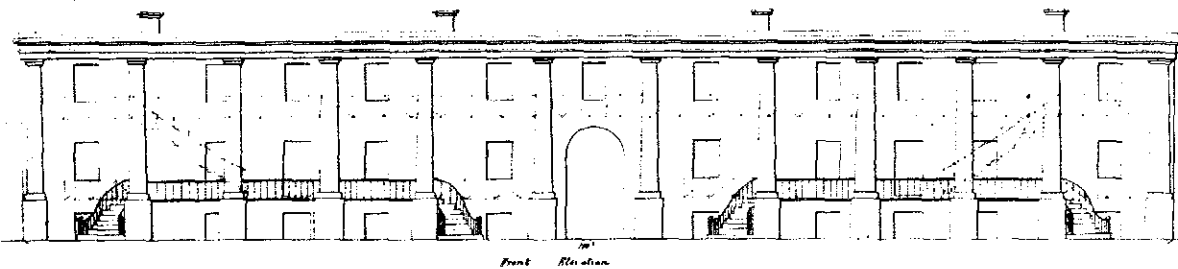
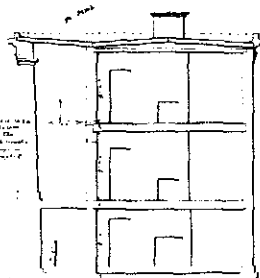


Plate 2
Photocopy of Drawings of Officer's Quarters, Fort Columbus, New York
National Archives, Record Group 92
Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General
Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1890
Plans of Alterations of Barracks, Fort Columbus
Drawn by Colonel James Bankhead, 1844

Proposed alteration in SOLDIERS QUARTERS in Fort Columbus Governors Island N.Y.



Notes: on original drawing
Approved by the Chief Engineer, with amendments and alterations (Drawn from these plans)
J.B. McPherson
Proposed alterations
Approved, August 1855
The alterations suggested by the Chief Engineer, and approved by the Board of Engineers, are shown by the dotted lines.
J.B. McPherson
Chief Engineer, Fort



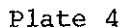
Scale of 1/4 inch to one foot

A.B. The above line indicates the present arrangement. The line shows the proposed alterations.

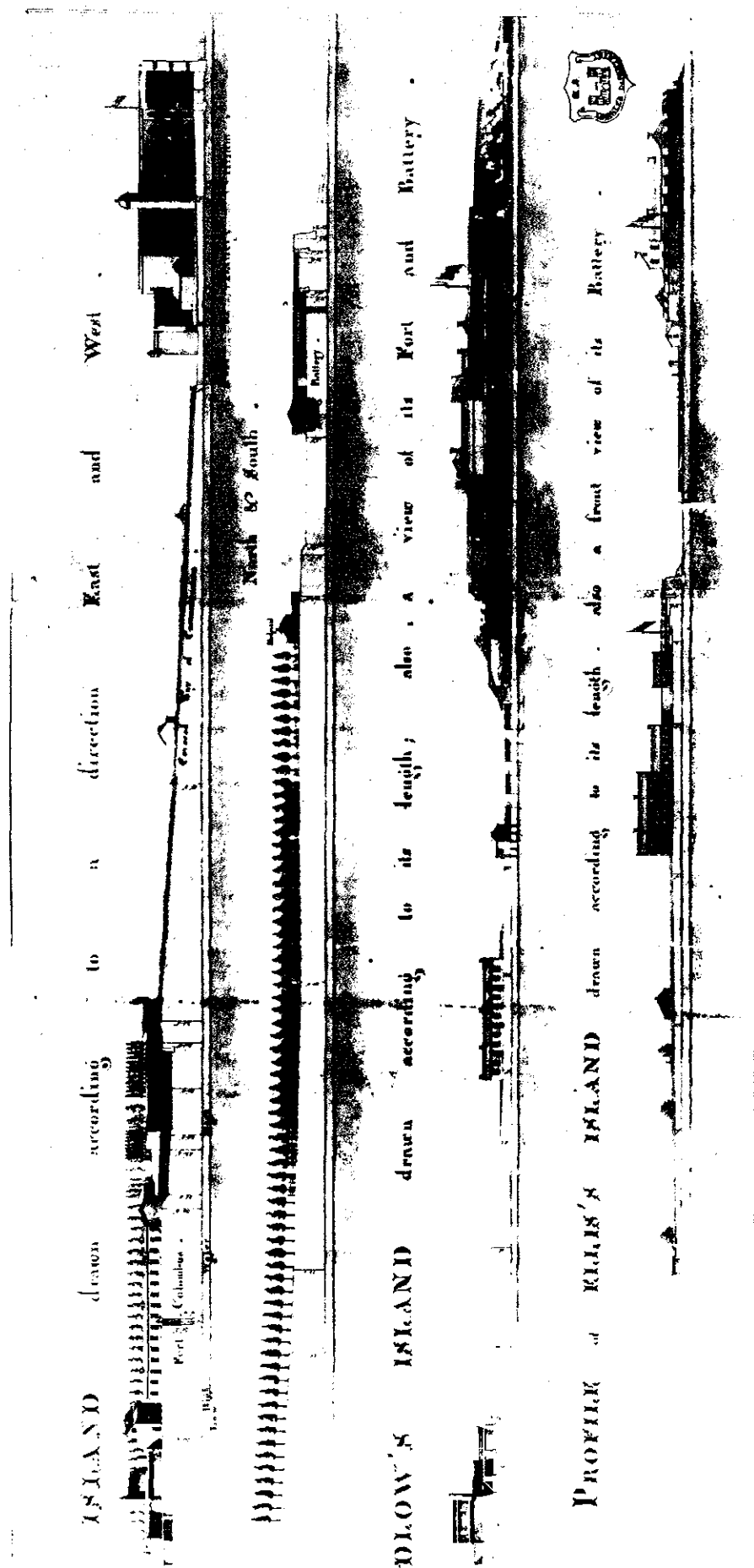
Approved, May 24, 1855
J.B. McPherson, Chief Engineer, Fort
The alterations suggested by the Chief Engineer, and approved by the Board of Engineers, are shown by the dotted lines.
J.B. McPherson
Chief Engineer, Fort

Plate 3

Photocopy of Drawings of Soldier's Quarters, Fort Columbus, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 37, sheet 39
Proposed Alteration in Soldiers Quarters in Fort Columbus
Drawn by J.B. McPherson, April 1855



Photocopy of Map of Governors Island, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 36, sheet 20
Profiles of Governors Island, Bedlow's Island and Ellis Island
Drawn by Joseph L. Mangin, June 1813



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Plate 5

Photocopy of Map of Governors Island, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 36, sheet 20
Profiles of Governors Island, Bedlow's Island and Ellis Island
Drawn by Joseph L. Mangin, June 1813

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) at the request of the United States Coast Guard, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, New York, who funded the project. The field work was accomplished during the summers of 1982 and 1983. The historic structures inventory, a National Historic Landmark District nomination and the documentation of five properties were completed in 1984. A three-volume report and inventory cards containing the results of the historic structures inventory have been transmitted to the Library of Congress as field records under HABS No. NY-5715. The National Historic Landmark District nomination was submitted and acted upon favorably by the National Park System Advisory Board in October of 1984.

Sally Kress Tompkins, Deputy Chief of HABS/HAER, was project manager. John Burns, AIA and S. Allen Chambers both of the HABS staff provided technical assistance and review; Jet Lowe, HAER staff photographer, completed the large format photography; Blanche Higgins, historian, and David Broderon of Cornell University completed the historic structures inventory during the summer of 1982; Barbara Hightower, historian, developed the HABS documentation during the summer of 1983; Karin Madison of the HABS/HAER staff assisted in the production of the report and provided photographic control. Paige George of the University of Virginia did the Governors Island map and title sheet. Jay Silberman, Environmental Specialist, District Planning Office, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, served as manager and coordinator of the project for the U.S. Coast Guard.